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ABSTRACT

Bilingual education involves the use of two languages as mediums of instruction. The particular goals of a bilingual education program often determine the type of program established. The two polar types of program models are: (1) that in which the native language is used only as an oral medium until the national language can be learned, and (2) that in which a full range of skills is developed for both languages. At present there is little research data available to answer many of the questions concerning bilingual education, but it does appear that cultural and socioeconomic factors may play a larger part than native language in students' academic success. Questions relating to the use of the two languages in programs also involve matters of staffing, teacher training, and certification. It must be remembered that a person does not qualify to teach merely because he speaks a particular language. Linguists and anthropologists should play a larger role in organizing bilingual education programs, developing materials, and training teachers. Bilingual education is not simply teaching English as a second language, but a more inclusive concept which insures for all of our children the opportunity to participate fully in the benefits of American life without having to sacrifice part of themselves to do it. (Author/PM)

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Statement on Linguistic Concerns in Bilingual Education Prepared for the National Advisory Committee on the Education of Bilingual Children 1/31/74

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Madam Chairman:

I appreciate very much the invitation to speak to the Committee today on linguistic considerations in bilingual education. I doubt that I shall say anything that is new or startling to anyone, but I hope that my remarks will be helpful to the Committee in your discussions on this subject later today.

Perhaps I should explain first that the Center for Applied Linguistics is an independent national and international resource and coordinating center funded by the Ford Foundation, which is concerned with the application of linguistic knowledge to the solution of educational problems. The Center has been concerned with bilingual education from its inception in this country, but since coming to the Center in 1972 as director, I have made it the top priority in the Center's work. This springs from my own belief in the importance of bilingual education as well as from my conviction as to the importance of linguistics to bilingual education.

One point which I think deserves to be made: in this country we are accustomed to exporting ideas and expertise to the rest of the world, but in the field of bilingual education other countries have had longer experience than the United States, and we desperately need to import knowledge and information from elsewhere. Bilingual education in this country has tended to develop in a vacuum, and we have been rather provincial, fulfilling Santayana's prophecy by reinventing the wheel rather than building on the experience of others. A second point is that linguistics and anthropology, two of the disciplines most equipped to provide input into bilingual/bicultural education, have been largely conspicuous by their absence from programs in this country (as evidenced, for example, by the program at the San Diego

conference last year). Yet in places like Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, and Nigeria, which we condescendingly refer to as developing countries or lesser developed countries, linguists and anthropologists have been requested by their government to take a leading role in organizing programs, developing materials, and training teachers. Again in this respect we have a great deal to learn from the examples of other countries. In view of this, the Center is cooperating with the Council on Anthropology and Education to hold an Interamerican Conference on Bilingual/Bicultural Education in Mexico City next November, which you are all invited to attend. The purpose of the Conference is to bring together people from North, South, and Central America to exchange ideas and experiences on a fairly intensive basis.

The basic question which you asked me to address today concerns the definition of bilingual education. (In other countries this is often called vernacular education, though because of the difference in name, some people fail to recognize the identity or even reject interest in vernacular education.) As those charged with administering Title VII in its early days learned to their dismay, bilingual education could mean almost anything. But if we ignore some of the more extreme (and sometimes amusingly ingenious) interpretations, as well as some of the more patently dishonest ones (such as programs for Indian children without any teachers who can speak the Indian language, while the school district collects federal funds), we can find a core of types of programs which can be designated as bilingual programs.

In the now-familiar words of the Act, bilingual education involves "the use of two languages . . . as mediums of instruction." How this definition is realized may depend on the goals of the program, with different interpretations being equally valid for different (or even the same) situations. To prefer a particular definition is often more to prefer a particular goal, from which the definition follows.

The two polar types of models are 1) that in which the native language is used only as an oral "crutch" until the national language can be learned and used in all functions thereafter, and 2) that in which a full range of skills is developed on a balanced basis throughout the curriculum for both languages. Both are legitimate, given particular goals. The basic question, therefore, is often a matter of language planning, a field with which linguists have had considerable experience. If the stated national goal

is "incorporation in the national life", as in Mexico, the first model might be preferred for its efficiency and economy. It might also be preferred by the community, as in the case of one pueblo in New Mexico which does not wish its language written lest outsiders gain access to it.

A second type of transitional model, which may easily be extended into a maintenance model, involves learning the basic reading skills in the native language while the national language is being learned orally, after which reading and writing skills are transferred to the national language, and the use of the native language is phased out. In a maintenance model, the native language is not phased out, but is continued to develop a full range of skills. We have just recently been working with the Navajo Division of Education to develop such a maintenance curriculum. The amount of balance in the curriculum between the two languages may vary, depending on goals and circumstances. Beyond this, there are many questions of how the languages are used in relation to one another, who uses them, and when, etc.

It would be nice to say that we have hard and fast research data to enable us to answer many of these questions, but the lack of funding for research in bilingual education leaves us knowing little more than we did when we started five years ago.

Cultural and socioeconomic factors may play an even more powerful effect in education than language; for example, although they are native English speakers, Blacks in San Francisco score lower than Spanish speakers on achievement tests, while in a research project the Center is conducting in cooperation with the Seattle Public Schools, it appears that Chinese do better than Filipinos and Spanish speakers, though all begin with the same level of English, and Chinese is much further from English than is Spanish. We must be careful not to oversell bilingual education as being a panacea for improving academic achievement, for some evidence indicates that the greatest gains are likely to be in the affective area, which may be the most important in the long run.

The questions of how, when, and where the two languages are used in bilingual programs relate to matters of staffing, teacher training, and certification as well. For example, if only aides speak the native languages, the image of its second-rate status will be reinforced. If truly bilingual teachers are demanded, or if native speakers are certified on the basis of

their linguistic knowledge, other problems may arise. Here Ecuador may be ahead of us in requiring training in Quichua for teachers in the primary grades. Even the BIA does not require this of its teachers working in all-Indian schools (though I should like to say in defense of the much-criticized BIA that its teachers are often better prepared, and students show a higher self-image, than in public schools).

A second important factor to recognize in staffing and teacher training is that a person does not qualify to teach merely because he speaks a particular language. A Spanish speaker who has grown up in a typical English-medium school environment will usually lack any knowledge of how to discuss even first-grade science lessons in Spanish. This can be remedied by appropriate training, but it is the sort of circumstance which often leads scientists in foreign countries who were trained in the U.S. to give their courses in English since they do not know how to discuss the subject in their native language.

Mr. Rebert spoke yesterday of the importance of linguists on the staff of bilingual programs for Indians, to help develop orthographies, analyze the grammar, and develop dictionaries and linguistically sound pedagogical materials, all of which I would second. Relatively few Indian bilingual programs have resident linguists, however, but programs for Spanish speakers are in far worse shape in this regard. There is a great need for research to establish norms of language development in various language communities as a basis for developing valid assessment instruments and teaching materials, and linguists are needed to work on this. There is also an urgent need for research on regional varieties of Spanish, particularly, to define the differences between home language and school language, and prepare appropriate materials and testing instruments.

When we speak of bilingual programs, we usually imply bicultural, though the two are not necessarily tied together. Nevertheless, teaching the child pride in his native culture cannot be separated from teaching him about it. In addition, language itself may be viewed as the expressive dimension of culture, and much of the culture of a group is embedded in its language.

As a final point, I would like to lay to rest what seems to me an unfortunate distinction between ESL and bilingual education. There are

many situations in which ESL alone is appropriate or desirable, or where the community itself desires it. Bilingual education is simply a more inclusive concept which by definition incorporates ESL as an indispensable part. Here again linguists can play an important part in materials development and teacher training.

One of my greatest concerns in bilingual education is that we strive to insure for all of our children a fairer opportunity to participate fully in the benefits of American life without having to sacrifice part of themselves to do it, or to be cut off from those benefits because they would first to their own selves be true. Above all, we must be committed to quality education, and not let children's best interests be sacrificed for emotional fervor or political ambition. I believe that the cause of equal opportunity, and with it, quality education, is what this Committee is all about. Thank you again for the opportunity to present these points to you here today.

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